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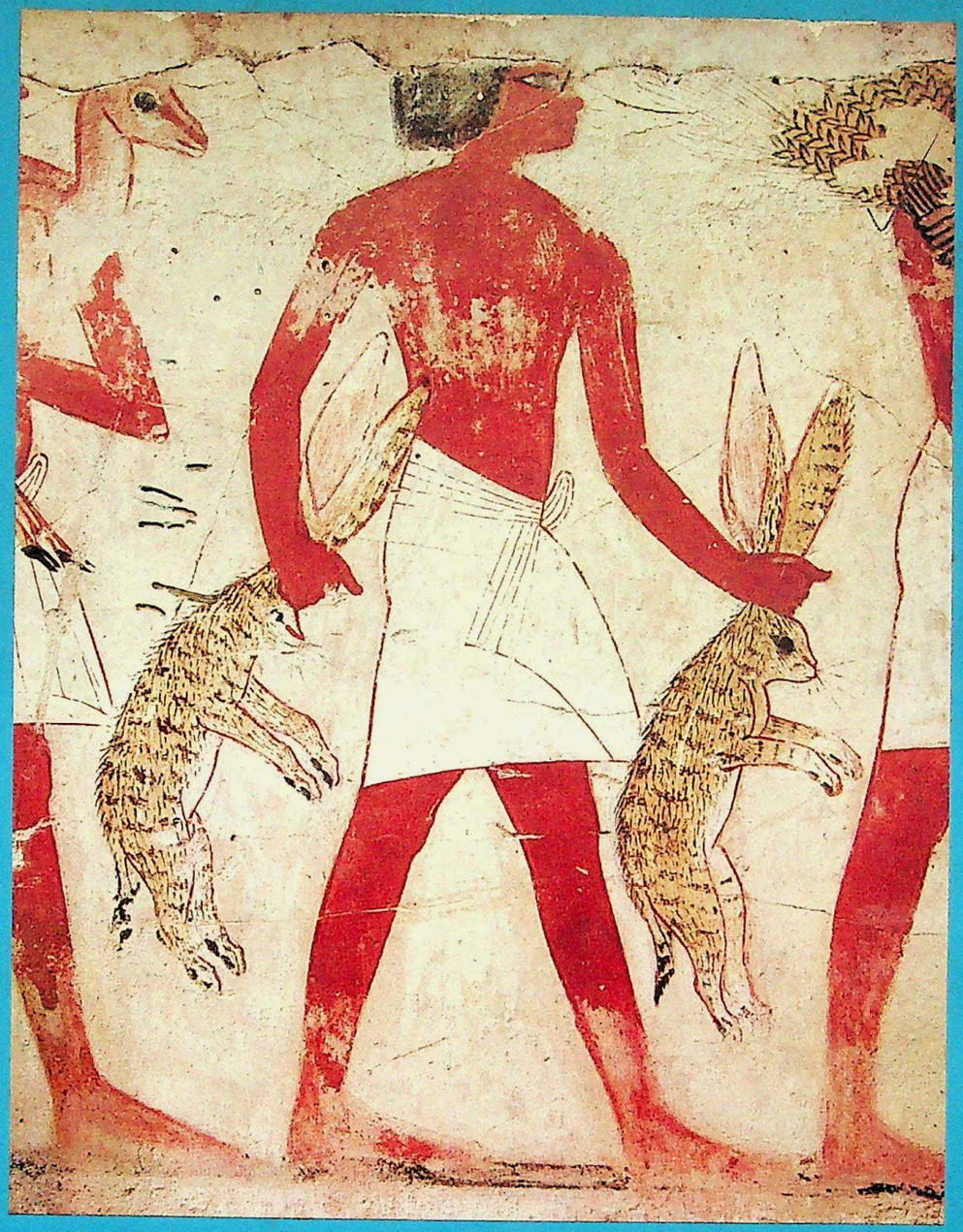

EGYPTIAN TOMB PAINTINGS

with an introduction and notes by

NINA M. DAVIES

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EGYPTIAN TOMB PAINTINGS

With an Introduction and Notes
by Nina M. Davies

from originals, mainly of the XVIII Dynasty, in the British Museum and the Bankes Collection

The author has spent her life in studying and copying Egyptian wall-paintings. Those reproduced in this book have been chosen from the 18th Dynasty; some have never been reproduced before, others only in black and white.

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Introduction by Nina M. Davies

A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE ARTISTIC ACHIEVEMENT OF ANCIENT EGYPT

To many people the art of Ancient Egypt is visualized in terms of architecture and sculpture while painted scenes are unfamiliar. A great legacy has come down to us: architecture, sculpture in the round and in low-relief; craftsmanship of all kinds of a superlative order, and last, but not least, painting.

In this short review we are confining ourselves to painting especially since the illustrations are reproduced from a selection of original fragments of mural paintings now in this country which once decorated the tomb-chapels.

Egyptian art (except in the hybrid forms of late Ptolemaic and Roman) owes little to any outside influences. But its impact can be traced both in Mesopotamia and Phoenicia and perhaps also in Cretan and early Greek art. On the other hand the more naturalistic outlook of the Amarneh age is considered to have some affinities with Minoan although the fall of Knossos before the reign of Akhenaten makes this doubtful unless, as has been suggested, Minoan art on the Greek mainland was responsible.[1] The known intercourse between ancient peoples probably influenced, if only in a minor degree, the treatment of Egyptian forms after the Old Kingdom.

The artists of the Nile valley were governed by conventions which originated in the earliest dynastic periods. Throughout its long history craftsmen handed down the traditions to each successive generation in accordance with the prescribed forms. Yet different dynasties show definite characteristics and modes of expression which enable the student to date sculpture and mural painting by their style. For example, the facial type of an Old Kingdom noble is easily distinguishable from that of an official of the Eighteenth dynasty, while King Amenophis III and his contemporaries have little in common with his successor Akhenaten and the men and women of his reign. Ramesside features in the Nineteenth dynasty are again quite distinctive. The portraits of the reigning pharaoh are reflected in those of his people, so that we can date the sculpture and painting to a reign, or nearly so.

HISTORICAL CHARACTERISTICS

The first six dynasties of the Old Kingdom (2778–2423 B.C.) are distinguished by a strong and virile art. The tombs at Saqqara, whose walls are covered with admirable low-relief sculptures, bear witness to this and the sculpture in the round of the period, much of which is preserved, was never surpassed in later times.

From the Sixth dynasty and lasting until the rise of the Eleventh dynasty, a period of historical obscurity and decline in all the arts took place.

The Eleventh dynasty under its strong pharaohs at Thebes in the south and the Twelfth dynasty at Lisht in the north were on the contrary times of great artistic achievement. At Beni Hasan however, in Middle Egypt, the large rock-cut tombs covered with paintings show varying merit; some are rough and provincial in style and others plainly by a master hand.

Again with the close of the Twelfth dynasty and lasting until the end of the Seventeenth, artistic effort declined. Asiatic invaders (Hyksos) dominated Egypt and the art of the country shows neither technical ability nor inspiration and it sank to a level reflecting the political decadence of the time. (2160–1580 B.C.).

With the rise of the Eighteenth dynasty (1580–1090 B.C.) at Thebes, the full flowering of Egyptian mural painting is at its height and the tomb-chapels of the nobles today still retain much of their decoration. Towards the end of the dynasty, at Amarneh, a spirit of freedom in the treatment of both human beings and natural forms of all kinds witnesses the revolt of the Pharaoh Akhenaten against the priestly conventions from which he there emancipated himself.

The strength and vigour of the Old Kingdom is replaced by a softer and less rigid style; some of the burial equipment from the tomb of the succeeding pharaoh, Tutankhamun, already shows signs of the lack of taste which is familiar later.

The Nineteenth dynasty, dominated by pharaohs bearing the names of Ramesses and Sethos, continues the decline in artistic standards. Yet much lovely low-relief sculpture is to be seen in the temple of Sethos I at Abydos.

The necropolis workmen of the period (whose village has been excavated by the French archaeological mission at Thebes) occupied their leisure hours in making sketches, generally on limestone flakes, in black and red paint. These are so untrammelled by convention and often so full of humour, that they are a revelation of what the Egyptian draughtsman was capable of when not obliged to conform to traditional designs. The freedom and beauty of line in such slight brush-drawings is admirable.[2]

After the Nineteenth dynasty the retrograde movement continues but in the Twenty-sixth dynasty (663–525 B.C.)[3] a renaissance took place and the craftsmen of the time sought to revive the ideals of the Old Kingdom—but their skill was not quite equal to the task. There is an interesting example of this tendency in the tomb of Aba (No. 36) at

[1] Frankfort, *The Mural Painting of El-Amarneh*, pp. 18–30.

[2] These sketches on limestone flakes have been ably copied by Mdme. Vandier-d'Abbadie, *Catalogue des Ostraca Figurés de Deir el-Medineh*, 3 vols.

[3] These dates are from J. Vandier and E. Drioton, *Les Peuples de l'Orient Méditerranéen, II, L'Égypte* (1952).

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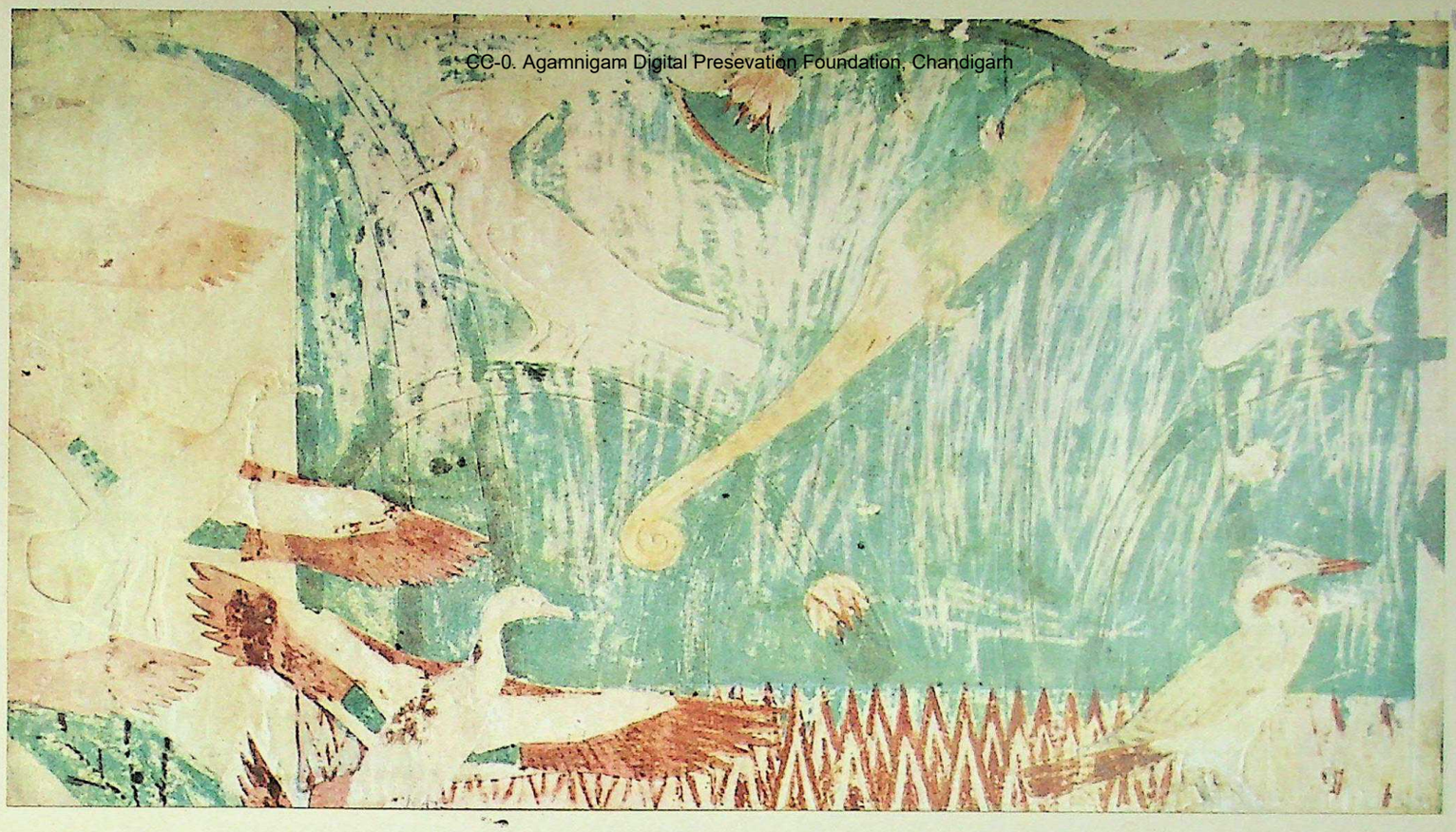

Plate 1. *Fragment of a Marsh Scene.* See page 24.

Thebes where an entire wall is almost a replica of a scene in an Old Kingdom tomb at Deir el-Gebrawi belonging to an official, also called Aba, over one thousand years earlier.[1]

THE TOMB PICTURES

The scenes on temple walls are outside our scope but we may sum up the traditional schemes of tomb decoration as follows.

In the Old Kingdom, mundane pleasures and occupations were those generally preferred and only rarely is a scene connected with funerary ceremonies depicted.

In the Middle Kingdom, although sport, agriculture and crafts occupy a large part of the wall-space, the funeral procession of the deceased and the rites pertaining to his statue in order to ensure an eternal existence for his personality, form a considerable part of the mural scenes.

In the New Kingdom, particularly towards the end of the Eighteenth dynasty, we find increasing importance given to funerary rites the aim of which was to ensure that the deceased should attain a 'goodly burial' in the Western Necropolis.

But the pleasures of life on earth are also given as much emphasis as in the Old Kingdom and pictured in greater variety. What the owner of the tomb-chapel hoped for was the continuation in a spiritual life of the occupations and pleasures he had to leave behind in his earthly existence and which he so enjoyed. He also wished to place on record his duties as an official of the king and his praiseworthy discharge of them.

The Ancient Egyptians left pictures of their daily life which are invaluable records whether they reflect their sojourn on earth or hoped-for joys to come.

With the advent of the Nineteenth dynasty, and to the end of Egyptian rule, the tomb scenes become increasingly divorced from earthly preoccupations. Funerary rites and the experiences of the deceased in the Nether World where he encounters the denizens and dangers of that world, supersede the pleasant pictures which are so frequent in the Eighteenth dynasty. There are, however, notable exceptions to be found in the Nineteenth dynasty, such as the interesting and beautiful murals in the tomb of Apy (No. 217)[2] and other isolated scenes interspersed amongst the rather monotonous funerary and cult ceremonies. Since the examples of mural painting in this book (with the exception of Pl. 1), originated in the Eighteenth dynasty tombs in the Theban necropolis, the following remarks primarily apply to them.

The subjects recorded by the artist-craftsmen on the walls constitute a very comprehensive record of the life of the nation at this period.

We find scenes such as the pharaoh with his officials occupied with the government of the people; foreign relations and trade; temple worship and ceremonial;

[1] Davies, *Deir el-Gebrawi*, (E.E.S.) I, pl. XXV.

[2] See Davies, *Two Ramesside Tombs at Thebes*, (M.M.A.), New York, 1927.

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funerary ritual; feasts and festivals. The recreations of hunting and fishing, as well as agriculture, crafts and professions, all have their place in the mural pictures, thus setting before us every phase of this ancient civilization. Moreover, we find animals, birds and fishes presented in their natural habitat and depicted with admirable care and observation.

We are shown a people industriously cultivating their land; ploughing, sowing, harvesting of corn and of flax, from which was spun the finest linen; cutting papyrus reeds in the marshes with which to make rope, matting and many household objects; fishing in the Nile and fowling in the adjoining reed thickets. Fish and fowl carefully prepared and potted by peasants for their master's use, whether for his daily food in this life or to be buried with him to serve his needs in the next state of existence.

The phrase 'taking recreation, seeing pleasant things', denotes how sport was enjoyed by the king and his nobles. Whole families took part in fishing and fowling—the wife sitting in the papyrus skiff; a son carrying a spare throw-stick for his father who is in the act of hurling another amongst a rising mass of birds; a daughter clinging to her father's leg or holding a nestling in her hand. To balance the composition—(the Egyptian had a passion for symmetry), the same sportsman spears fish on the opposite side of the scene while below the boat there may be crocodiles, fish and lotus flowers, all amongst the blue rippled water. Such a scene is of frequent occurrence.[1] Hunting wild animals of the desert driven into a netted enclosure by beaters and then shot down by arrows and attacked by hunting-dogs, is also a favourite pastime; but here the family generally remains at home and only the noble in his chariot is pictured, attended by his servants who afterwards carry the game in procession away from the scene of slaughter.

Representations of foreign peoples in their peculiar dress bringing the products of their countries to the king, are of much interest archaeologically and the artist took pains to represent them correctly.

Craftsmen at work, carpenters, jewellers, chariot-makers, leather-workers, potters, makers of gold, silver and stone vases, to enumerate only a few of the recorded trades, afford a most illuminating and detailed picture of intense activity prevailing in the workshops. Their products in part went to the treasuries of the temples and, as we have ample evidence from the tomb of Tutankhamun, formed the elaborate burial equipment of kings and nobles. Such workshops and their output are pictured in detail in many tomb-chapels.

From mundane scenes we turn to the funerary ceremonies necessary to facilitate the passing of the deceased from his earthly home to his 'House of Eternity'.

In the Eighteenth dynasty such funerary representations usually occupy a special position in a second chamber leading to the shrine beneath which was the burial vault containing the sarcophagus.

The Ancient Egyptian was much preoccupied with the thought of what awaited him in the dim world of the Hereafter and therefore he dreaded the annihilation of body and soul which he was at great pains to circumvent. He envisaged an existence after death in which he could continue to enjoy all the pleasant things of the world he had left. Therefore his mummy must have all the senses of the living body magically restored so that this was possible. Hence the elaborate ritual scenes in addition to the temporal representations.[2] These rites are however, too conventionally drawn and stereotyped in character to have much artistic value.

METHODS USED IN PAINTING

It may be of interest to give a few details of the technique of Egyptian wall-painting. This in its various stages can best be studied in the Eighteenth dynasty tombs at Thebes, situated on the west bank of the Nile opposite the modern town of Luxor.

When the stone surface permitted, the scenes were generally in low-relief sculpture and the details and outlines afterwards added in paint. The colour obliterated the delicate relief, and the outline, an essential part of the finished painting, still further detracted from it. When the colour has perished the careful modelling underneath is exposed. (see Pl. 1).

Often the tomb was excavated in poor quality rock or shale and a mud plaster mixed with straw was applied. This, when dry, was again covered by a perfectly smooth buff plaster. In good Eighteenth dynasty work an even hard surface resulted.

On this a string dipped in red ochre was snapped vertically and horizontally by the craftsman, dividing the wall-space into squares within which the decoration had to be drawn.

The figures were then sketched in with red paint. The next stage was a background, white, golden yellow, or pale blue, brought to the limit of the sketch-lines. The colour masses were then put in, varied by stippling of bright red, blue, or sometimes (as on animals' coats), grey or black. Finally, the precise outlines of the figures completed the composition but were omitted on black hair and other black objects. Shading of parts of the body is rare, but the Eighteenth dynasty group of musicians and guests in the British Museum has traces on the soles of the feet (see Pl. 8). It is again met with in the Nineteenth dynasty tomb of Userhet (No. 51) on the cheeks of the women. In the Valley of the Queens it is seen on Queen Nefertari's figure, and in the adjoining tomb of Prince Amenkhopshef, high lights have been attempted.

The few chapels where the colouring is perfectly

[1] See *Tomb of Nakht at Thebes*, pl. XXIV, (M.M.A.), New York, 1929.

[2] In this connection see Gardiner, *The Tomb of Amenemhet*, (E.E.S.), pp. 17–21, for the dual purpose of the tomb paintings.

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preserved show the brilliant effect the craftsmen were able to achieve with a limited palette of red and yellow ochre, blue and green—these derived from powdered azurite and malachite, or, later, frits obtained from copper compounds. Bone black and gypsum white were also used.

The painting was a gouache technique. No true fresco painting is found in Egypt.

THE SCHEME OF THE WALL DECORATION

The general scheme of the tomb wall is that of a decorative panel. Since we are illustrating murals from the Eighteenth dynasty, the following description refers to this period only but many variations occur even at this time.

A typical chapel has its walls in the first chamber occupied by scenes of this world. It is divided horizontally by several black base-lines on which the feet of the figures stand. Much larger figures of the deceased owner, sometimes followed by his wife, interrupt two or more of these horizontal divisions vertically so that they dominate the rows of smaller figures of servants, etc., below them. The whole wall is enclosed with ornamental borders. At the top is a very conventional rendering of what is thought to have been originally a sort of palisade derived from reeds tied top and bottom so that an elongated tassel-like object (given the name of *kheker*) results. Below there is sometimes also a band of lotus buds and flowers which may have no surmounting *khekers*. A narrow ribbon-like border of rectangles coloured alternately blue, red, green and yellow, each divided by a white square edged with black and enclosed by a green band, frames the top and sides of the wall under the frieze (see Pl. 3). This ends at a dado made up of broad bands of colour about two feet from the floor the purpose of which is to prevent the lower part of the scene getting damaged.

The ceilings were divided up into panels each filled with coloured patterns and lines of text between them.

The short end-walls are generally occupied by inscriptions, while the inner chamber, leading to the shrine at the end containing a niche for a statue of the deceased, is taken up with funerary rites although a hunting-scene may have a place near the entrance or, as in the large tomb of Rekh-mi-re (No. 100), craftsmen are seen at work.

The whole scheme is enlivened with bright colour and has a distinctive character unparalleled in any other ancient art.

TREATMENT OF HUMAN AND ANIMAL FORMS

Those unfamiliar with Egyptian art find it hard to accept the curious traditional form by which the human figure is represented. The head in profile, yet the eye shown in plan; the frontal view of the shoulders and the side view of the body and legs. But it is surprising how soon the spectator gets used to all these conventions and accepts the contradictions as more or less natural. The pictured hieroglyph of a human being is, in miniature, just what the larger human beings on the tomb walls look like. Persons were drawn symbolically in accordance with age-long custom and it was decreed that such a convention personified a man and embodied all his essential features. Also if he was the owner of the tomb-chapel or held high office, his figure must be larger and predominate over the lesser folk about him. This rigid convention is often relaxed when peasants, craftsmen, musicians or dancers are pictured. They do not require hieratic dignity and liberties could be allowed with their figures.

At Amarneh we find that far more freedom in depicting the human form is applied to both the royal family and the nobles and the local artists were quick to take advantage of less severe restrictions. Long before the Amarneh period however, at Meir and Beni Hasan, there is a break-away from the conventional drawing of the figure. But this applies again only to persons such as herdsmen, hunters, etc., and is not comparable to the general revolution in style which came about at Amarneh.

Egyptian painting nevertheless remains two-dimensional throughout its history and perspective is almost non-existent, except in very rare instances such as the figure of a girl in the tomb of Rekh-mi-re (No. 100) where a three-quarter back-view is presented.[1] It is strange that this figure, once drawn, should remain almost an isolated example.[2]

Writers on Egyptian art have pointed out that pictured objects must be plainly indicated and not left to the imagination. For example, the contents of a box are shown above it and the interior decoration of a gold vase is arranged erect on the rim. Similarly, the different parts of the human figure are enumerated so that they can be seen at a glance. This probably influenced the curious contortions sometimes met with when the draughtsman had to deal with unusual postures.

Apart from the human form the Egyptian artist was capable of a closer approach to nature in his pictures of animals, birds, and lesser creatures. These reveal much keen observation and, although the bright colouring he loved sometimes bears little resemblance to reality, the essential characteristics are all very carefully delineated. Hunting-scenes show gazelle, ibex and oryx, wild cattle, desert hares, hyenas, ostriches, wild asses and other animals, while trained dogs of special breed help to bring down the game. All these are excellently drawn and full of action. One of Tutankhamun's caskets has an astonishing lion-hunt on one side and on the other a variety of animals all showing the utmost detail and realism although on a miniature scale.

[1] A. Mekhitarian, *Egyptian Painting*, p. 51. (Coloured photograph). Davies, *Rekh-mi-re*, (M.M.A.), vol. II, pl. LXIV (in line).

[2] See also W. S. Smith, *Sculpture and Painting in the Old Kingdom*, Boston, pp. 326–337.

[*Continued on page* 24

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Plate 2

THE HEAD AND SHOULDERS OF A MAN HOLDING TWO LIGHTED BRAZIERS

Bankes collection, Kingston Lacy.[1]

Dimensions of original, 12 in. × 28 in.

Eighteenth dynasty. Probably from Thebes.

From the precise outlines and general style it seems probable that this fragment dates from the reigns of Tuthmosis III or Amenophis II, that is to say from the early Eighteenth dynasty.

The man is evidently the owner of the tomb-chapel but his name is not preserved. Whether the piece has been cut out from an existing chapel or whether all except this fragment has perished we cannot tell. The few hieroglyphs above him and those below his left arm do not afford any clue.

The two bronze braziers which he holds are piled with ducks and loaves of different shapes. Flames rise from the bowls of the braziers fed by incense or inflammable unguent. This is the usual ritual offering to the sun-god by the dead man who is pictured at the entrance of his tomb-chapel facing east and greeting the light of the sun.[2] The coiled snake between his hands in red paint is a graffito by a later visitor to the tomb.

The wig (?) which has all the little curls in relief, is commonly worn by nobles of the period. The curls were first built up on the smooth wall surface by means of thick drops of gypsum plaster and when dry and hard, black paint was added. Often the same technique is found on necklaces or on the king's 'blue crown' helmet.

The man's necklace is composed of two rows of cylindrical gold beads fitting close to his neck; then three rows of blue faience (?) bands divided by white; and lastly, blue or green ovoid shapes, perhaps inlaid on a gold ground, and divided by red petal-like forms of carnelian or red faience. He also wears two broad gold bracelets on his upper arm and bracelets on his wrists made of gold and plaques of green and blue inlay.

His tunic is transparent, the red flesh showing pink beneath it while its white material may be seen extending beyond the line of his body on the right. Extant pieces of finely-woven linen demonstrate that such transparency was a fact.

The whole is good typical early Eighteenth dynasty work, rather stiff and formal but carefully executed with fine outlines and smooth colour surface.

[1] The fragments illustrated on Pls. 2, 5 and 6, now in the Bankes collection, were brought to England in 1821 together with Pls. 7, 8, 9 and 10 which came to the British Museum. The latter, obtained from the Salt collection in Cairo, were transported in the same ship as the Bankes murals. Thanks are due to Mr. Ralph Bankes, who has kindly given facilities for reproducing these fragments here for the first time.

[2] For a parallel scene see Davies, *Menkheperrasonb*, (E.E.S.), Pl. XXIII, p. 21.

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Plate 3

NUBIANS BRINGING TRIBUTE

Original in the British Museum (No. 922).

Dimensions of detail 22 in. × 16 in.

Presented to the British Museum by H. Danby Seymour in 1869. The whole fragment is illustrated in *Wall Decorations of Egyptian Tombs in the British Museum*, p. 15, fig. 9. From the tomb of Sebkhotpe (No. 63) dating from the Eighteenth dynasty, reign of Tuthmosis IV (1420–1411 B.C.).

This tomb has had very many of its mural scenes cut out and sold to interested travellers of the nineteenth century when there was nothing to prevent such plunder by the local inhabitants who lived in the tomb-chapels. The fragments still on the walls show similar style and technique.[1]

This picture, part of a long procession of Nubians bringing tribute to the pharaoh who was seated on the left, comes from the top row of the right-hand wall of the first chamber. The tomb is a typical Eighteenth dynasty chapel consisting of a long transverse outer chamber with a doorway in the centre leading to the inner corridor in the same axis as the entrance to the tomb.

The ornamental frieze at the top of *Kheker* and ribbon-border is that described on p. 5.

The first tribute bearer, whose black pigment is so much more evanescent than red, shows the preliminary sketch lines and little of the black flesh tint. He wears a red and white loin-cloth of cow-hide and his offerings consist of a chain of gold rings which were a form of currency, and also a basket on which is a green mass, possibly malachite.

The figure in the centre is not necessarily of a different race since the Ancient Egyptian's love of pattern would show him thus to prevent a monotonous line of black figures. This device is clearly seen in the tomb of Huy (No. 40)[2] where Nubians are of different colours and even the curls of hair are shown against alternate blue and red scalps. He wears a black and white skin kilt and his earring, bracelet, together with a necklace and a pendant in the form of a fly, are probably all of ivory.[3] On his shoulders he bears what is clear from other such scenes as logs of ebony bound together with cords at the ends. In his left hand he holds a bundle of giraffe tails (?) which are also to be seen in the tomb of Huy (No. 40).

The last man has his black pigment better preserved; his kilt is the same as that of the first Nubian, thus alternating the colour of the skins as well as the flesh. He carries a red substance in a yellow reed basket in one hand and a panther's skin in the other. A dog-faced baboon, also a favourite form of tribute, appears between his legs and, in the complete figure, a green monkey clings to the back of his head.

[1] Porter and Moss, *Bibliography*, vol. 1, p. 93 (1927).

[2] Davies, *The Tomb of Huy*, (No. 40,) (E.E.S.), Pl. XXVIII.

[3] Davies, *Paintings from the Tomb of Rekh-mi-re*, (M.M.A.), Pl. VII.

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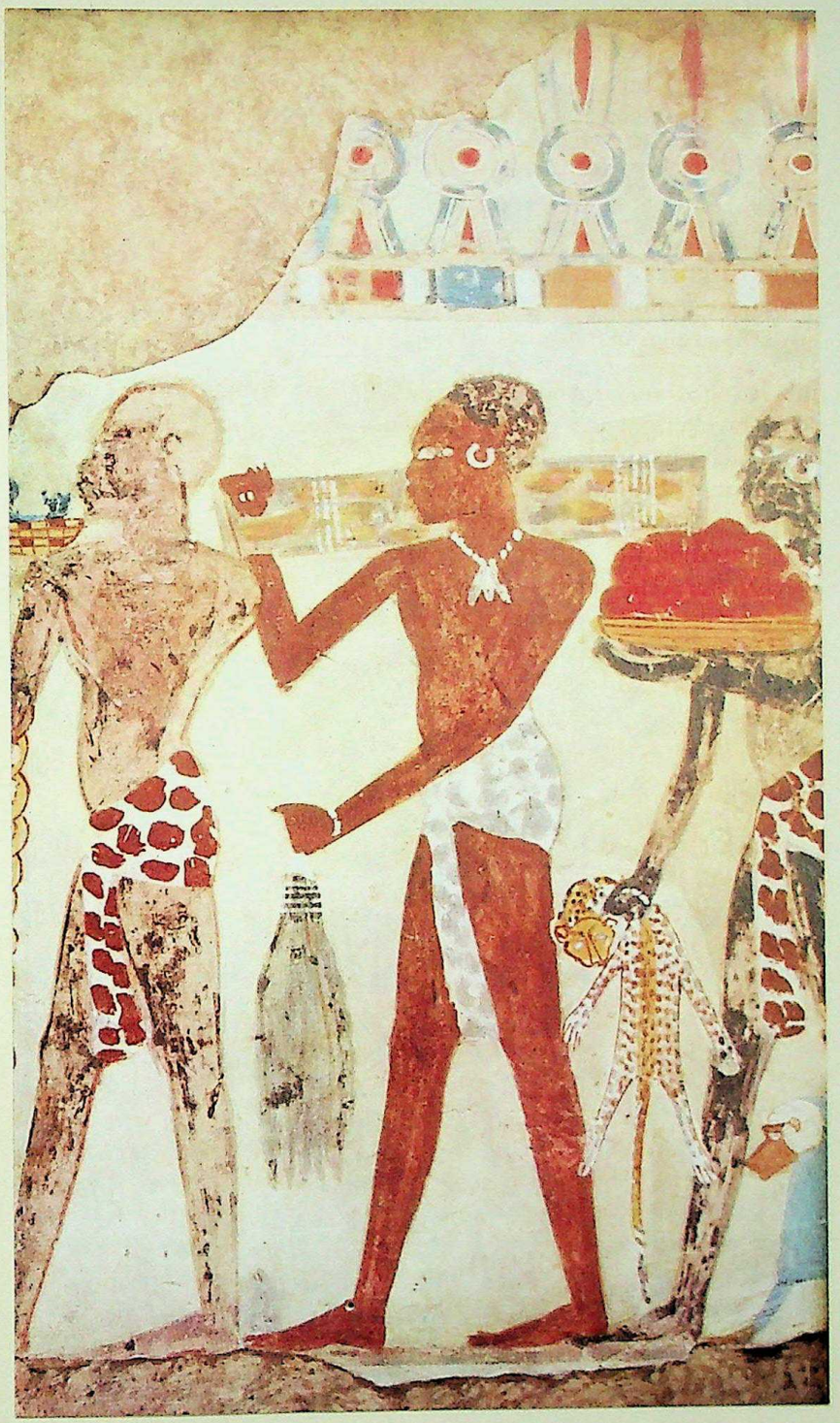

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Plate 4

JEWELLERS AT WORK

Original in the British Museum (No. 920).

Dimensions of detail 24 in. × 15 in.

Illustrated in *Wall Decorations of Egyptian Tombs*, p. 14, fig. 8.

Presented to the Museum by H. Danby Seymour in 1869. From the tomb of Sebkhotpe (No. 63), Eighteenth dynasty, reign of Tuthmosis IV (1420–1411 B.C.).

This scene of craftsmen is another of the detached fragments which have found their way to the British Museum together with a considerable number of others from the same tomb.

The jewellers were a large body of craftsmen who have hardly ever been surpassed in the quality of their work. Their skill in making beads, sometimes of infinitesmal size, is amazing. Those of gold, semi-precious stones, such as carnelian, haematite and lapis, were pierced for threading by the use of tiny multiple drills as in our illustration. Others, made of faience and coloured by glazes, were baked on a wire. Very fine linen thread was employed for stringing.

The patterns composed of such beads are of infinite variety. From the tomb of Tutankhamun we have a cushion entirely of bead-work picturing Nubians and Syrians—the subject nations of the South and North. On the King's head was a close cap of similar fine bead-work. The quantity of such objects as necklaces, bracelets, rings and other decorations worn by both sexes, whether alive or in their mummy-wrappings, particularly in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth dynasties is remarkable.

Here two men in the upper scene are working a multiple drill to pierce holes in some substance such as carnelian. The bowls beneath their tables probably contained a hard powder to be placed in the holes and facilitate the grinding. Spoons in the bowls seem indicated for this purpose.

The man on the right is polishing the finished beads and the threaded rows are above. Two gold jars and a silver cup in the form of a lotus-flower have been completed by other craftsmen.

Below, on the left, are traces of another man working a multiple drill. In front of him the finished beads, together with faience plaques of blue and red glaze, are being fitted together to make one of the large collar-like necklaces which are worn by the ladies on Pls. 5 and 6. The third man is working three drills instead of four, perhaps to produce the larger beads before him. These are intended to be thought of as really in the casket below. The contents of a box are often shown thus (see p. 5).

A man on the right whose back is visible, is at work on larger objects such as vases in the complete picture.

[1] See Davies, *Deir el-Gebrawi*, (E.E.S.), part I, p. 20, for a description of methods of drilling.

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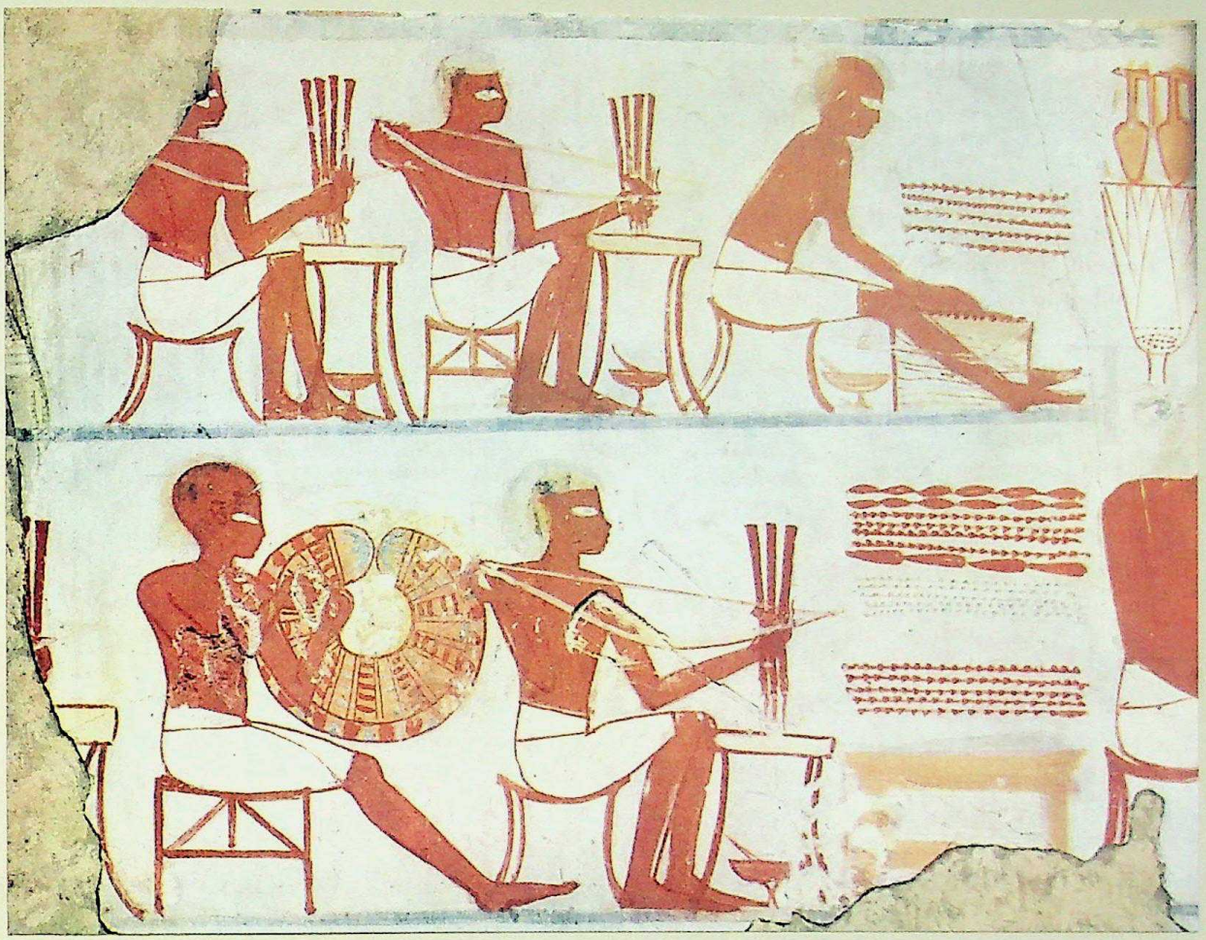

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Plate 5

A GROUP OF FEMALE MUSICIANS

Bankes collection, Kingston Lacy.
Dimensions of original 33 in. × 16 in.
Eighteenth dynasty. Probably from Thebes.

The scene has the appearance of damage resulting from the effect of smoke. Egyptian felaheen living in Theban tombs are often the cause of this by lighting fires in the interiors. Therefore the details are difficult to make out. A photograph often tends to exaggerate the damage and does not bring out existing forms beneath it which perhaps a hand copy could interpret.

On the left a man holds a shallow dish in one hand and two little jugs suspended from his fingers from the other. He might be a serving-man since he is devoid of all ornament and wears the close cap or shaven head common to attendants. Before him is a pile of eatables. This, beginning at the top, consists of a long bunch of young onions such as modern Egyptians are also partial to; some substance piled on a basket; red ribs of beef attached to a lump of meat; a cucumber; two round loaves and an oval one, decorated with perhaps sesame seeds as is the custom today. All is placed on an alabaster table traces of which are visible (see Pl. 7 for a similar table). The owner of the chapel and his wife are to be imagined as seated facing the attendant, enjoying the offerings and listening to the music.

The first girl plays the tall harp so often in the hands of women musicians. It is impossible to see how many strings it has but fourteen are shown in the tomb of Nakht (No. 52). The lower part is decorated with painted lotus-flowers, a section in the middle being covered with the usual conventional panther's skin. The player has a fillet of lotus-petals round her head from which numerous curls descend to her shoulders. She also wears an elaborate necklace and a long diaphanous garment through which her limbs appear—its outline extending beyond her figure.

The second girl is looking to the right facing the last musician. She also wears a lotus-fillet, a gold and faience necklace, and a transparent robe like her two companions. She is playing a lute—a guitar-like instrument struck with a plectrum and furnished with stops and tassels at the end of a long stem.

The last musician plays a lyre, often pictured on Greek vases but now obsolete. Her hair is again bound by a fillet from under which her curls descend, and a deep necklace. She keeps step to the music like the lute-player in front of her.[1]

Traces of a green rush mat can be seen above their heads on which doubtless a row of guests was seated.

A girl playing the double pipes and dancing, is frequently a member of the orchestra while often a group of women accompany the music, clapping their hands to the tune.

Sometimes the music is played for the entertainment of the owner of the tomb and his wife who sit facing the performers. At other times, seated female guests in a row are thus enlivened and only girl performers are present while male guests have men only. Mixed groups of male and female players are, however, pictured before the married pair.

[1] Parallels to this group may be seen in Davies, *Nakht* (No. 52) (M.M.A.), Frontispiece, and *Tombs of Two Officials*, (E.E.S.), Pl. V and Pls. XXI, XXIII.

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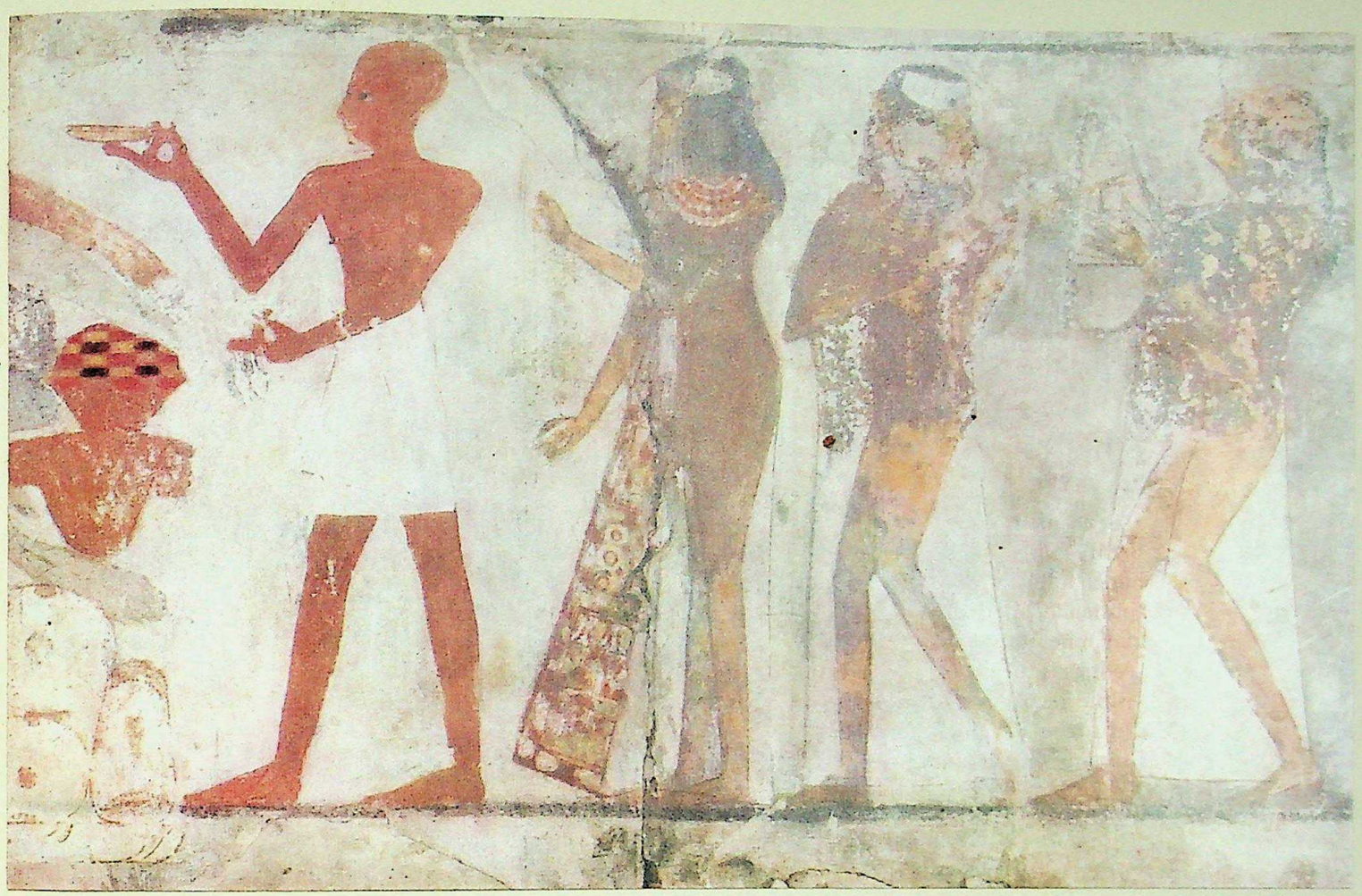

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Plate 6

A MALE HARPER

Original in the Bankes collection, Kingston Lacy.
Dimensions 24 in. × 16 in.
Eighteenth dynasty. Probably from Thebes.

Festival scenes in Theban tombs are seldom complete without music and dancing to add to the entertainment of the rows of seated guests.

A male harper such as we illustrate here is often pictured and he is occasionally accompanied by a male choir who clap their hands in rhythmic time to his music. These men are nearly always realistically depicted blind[1] as well as the harper and it is rare to find one like our example who is not so. A blind harper could improvise a tune and sing to it although incapacitated for most other professions and he seems to have been in great demand. No blind female harper is so far known but this may be due to the fact that music and dancing were essentially women's professions rather than men's.

Male harpers are usually in this squatting position and play the same kind of harp as in our picture. It is somewhat rare to find a man playing the tall harp which is seemingly the same height as that of the girl to whom it is generally assigned (see Pl. 5). The low instrument is occasionally in the hands of a woman[2] but this is as uncommon as a man playing the tall variety.

The one here has a female head as a terminal at the top which is probably that of the goddess Ma'et. These terminals, either at the top or bottom of the harp, may also represent a falcon's head (the god Horus), or a king's head with the appropriate headdress[3]. The body of this harp is of wood painted with a decoration derived from lotus-flowers and the base rests on a strut in the form of the hieroglyph 'the knot amulet of Isis' which is attached to the support steadying the instrument under the hands of the player, who sits on a mat of green rushes tied at intervals. The harp has nine strings, but this number seems to vary a good deal.

His song, which was perhaps meant to be written between the two lines in front, was never inserted.

The scene is pictured at the top of the wall under the usual 'ribbon-border' which runs along its length beneath a partially-shown frieze composed of yellow mandrake fruit and red poppies.

[1] *The Tomb of Nakht*, (M.M.A.), Pl. XVII, where he is also singing.

[2] Gardiner, *Amenemhet*, (E.E.S.), Pl. XV.

[3] Wilkinson, *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians*, (Birch ed.) vol. I, Pl. XI.

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Plate 7

A FESTIVAL SCENE

Original in the British Museum (No. 37986).

Dimensions 26 in. × 12 in.

Lower of two registers illustrated in *Wall Decorations of Egyptian Tombs*, Pl. 5.

The name of the owner is lost, but it is certainly that of Pls. 8 and 9.

From Thebes, Eighteenth dynasty. Style of Amenophis III (1411–1375 B.C.).

This is an exceptionally well-preserved scene retaining its colour and with few blemishes. Obviously the tomb had not been lived in like so many others in the necropolis but was newly uncovered when these paintings were acquired by the British Museum.

On the left is a heaped table of eatables but our reproduction only shows half. At the top is a pile of persea figs. Those in present-day Egypt are small, hard and sour, but nevertheless they are frequently shown amongst other fruits in the paintings. A bunch of grapes and part of a long loaf of bread, decorated with sesame seeds (?), has an unplucked duck beneath it. Then what appears to be portions of meat above a large wicker basket of grapes tied together in the centre, and one side of an upright loaf. All these are placed on an alabaster table, similar to that on Pl. 5, beneath which is one of two sealed jars of beer or wine with the stem of a lotus-bud twined round them. The young girl has poured some of the contents of the jars into cups and presents the drink to the foremost lady; she bears a fringed napkin in case of need.

Her garments consist only of a bead girdle and a large necklace similar to the guests, and she, like the others, wears a fillet of flower-petals—whether faience or real lotus-petals we cannot tell.

Each lady has also a fresh lotus-bud hanging over her forehead and a cone of scented unguent is on top of a large wig, the curls of which are parted to reveal a round ear-ring. These cones of scented fat are always a feature in festival scenes and we find pictures where they are taken from a vase by the attendant and placed on the head of a guest. In one tomb we also see their preparation.[1] The yellow streaks which descend from the top and the similar ripples spread over the white robes seem related to one another. The idea of unguent streaming down to such an extent does not seem attractive in our day but at this period it was a necessary adjunct to a festive gathering.[2] Cones of unguent are similarly placed on the heads of anthropoid coffins of the dead. Do they perhaps here symbolize or imply a 'happy burial'?

The ladies sit on ebony chairs furnished with cushions. Above their heads the background has divisions in which a descriptive text and the names should be written, but the scribe, unlike the painter, has not done his task. The man on the extreme right, perhaps the deceased, is presented with refreshments by a boy attendant.

[1] Tomb (No. 175), Name lost.

[2] This streaky yellow dye is discussed in Davies, *The Tomb of Nakht*, (M.M.A.), pp. 56–57.

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Plate 8

GUESTS AND MUSICIANS

Original in the British Museum (No. 37981).

Dimensions 24 in. × 12 in.

It belongs to the same tomb as Pls. 5, 7 and 9.

From an Eighteenth dynasty Theban chapel of the reign of Amenophis III (1411–1375 B.C.).

The upper scene shows the women guests seated side by side. A man who has his back to them is on the left. The first two ladies are embracing one another and a mandrake fruit is held up to the face of the second, while the fourth turns to the right and extends a lotus-bud to her neighbour.

Dress and ornaments are similar to those on Pl. 7, but the chair cushions are more diversified.

Below are five musicians, similar in style to those reproduced in *Wall Decorations of Egyptian Tombs*, B.M., Pl. IV.[1]

They squat on the ground showing the soles of their feet. These have unmistakable shading which is most unusual at this period although it occurs in the Nineteenth dynasty, notably in the tomb of Queen Nefertari in the Valley of the Queens.[2]

Two of the musicians are playing guitars or lutes and one the double pipes. The instrument in the hand of the last woman may be a rectangular tambourine. One of the guitar players and the girl with the pipes wear two rings in addition to the numerous bracelets which are common to all the group.

These fragile faience rings, worn by musicians and female attendants, are perhaps temporary ornaments. Parts of such rings, decorated with a king's cartouche or an amuletic symbol, are abundantly found in debris.

The text above the figures is here filled in, and gives the titles of the deceased owner which, being similar to those on Pl. 9, prove that both scenes are from the same chapel.

Since the break in the text is intentional, it indicates that agents of the heretic king Akhenaten were here responsible for the erasure as in other Theban tombs. The elimination of the name of Amun was systematically carried out through the Theban necropolis during his reign when he substituted the worship of the Aten sun-disc in place of the Theban god Amun.

The owner of the tomb, 'the scribe, accountant of the grain in the temple of [Amun'], is promised a burial in the necropolis as 'the justified one, identified with Osiris'.

[1] See also *An. Eg. Paintings*, Pl. LXX.

[2] *Op. cit.*, Pl. XCI.

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Plate 9

A HERDSMAN PRESENTING HIS CATTLE

Original in the British Museum (No. 37976).

Dimensions 11 in. × 24 in.

Illustrated in *Wall Decorations of Egyptian Tombs*, Pl. I, which includes the register above.

The titles, identical with those of Pl. 8 are evidence that the scene has to do with the activities of the same owner.

The Akhenaten erasure of the name of Amun, leaving a trace of the *nb* hieroglyph below the right-hand corner of the break, makes it probable that his name was Neb [amun].[1]

Part of a decorated bag with plain red above and a checker pattern below, belongs to a seated scribe whose hands hold a white writing-board or unrolled sheet of papyrus on which he is entering the number of cattle given by the subservient employee of the estate who bows low before him. The long-horned beasts, their skins decoratively diversified, are in charge of a young drovesman who holds a coiled rope in one hand while with the other he seems to display the good qualities of his charges as their number is entered in the record of the scribe. The text above the cattle reads as follows: "Come, desist, do not chatter in the presence of the favoured one. People who chatter are an abomination! He does what is right; he does not forget any report. Pass on in silence and in good order. He will not act against anyone. He knows everything. So said the scribe of the accounts Neb [amun]."[2]

As the scenes on Pls. 7, 8 and 9 all originate from the same chapel, they may be epitomized as follows. Nebamun (if this be his name), is dead, for the short text on Pl. 8 speaks of his burial in the necropolis (literally in 'the God's Land'). He is identified with, and justified before, Osiris, the God of the Dead. On earth his profession was that of a scribe and accountant of the grain in the temple of Amun.

Other tombs of the period visualize for us how his mummified body in its anthropoid coffin had been magically re-endowed with all the senses of a living man. It was then placed on a catafalque dragged by oxen, accompanied by priests, and taken to the tomb-chapel in the western hills where the Goddess of the necropolis was ready to receive him into its dark recesses.

When the deceased is finally entombed in the sarcophagus-chamber and enters 'the Land that loveth Silence', he is not deprived of all he has left behind. His tomb-chapel above has long been prepared for him, and, by virtue of the magical powers he has been given, he sees his friends as in life seated in festive attire holding lotus-flowers and waited on by young girls who supply him and them with refreshments. Music and dancing add gaiety to the scene; and the occupations connected with the office he held on earth are also recorded on the walls.

[1] See *An. Eg. Paintings*, vol. III, (text), where Sir Alan Gardiner, discussing Pls. LXV-VII, considers that Nebamun is the name of the owner of the tomb.

[2] The Author is indebted to Mr. Edwards, Keeper of the Egyptian Department, for his help in the translation of this text.

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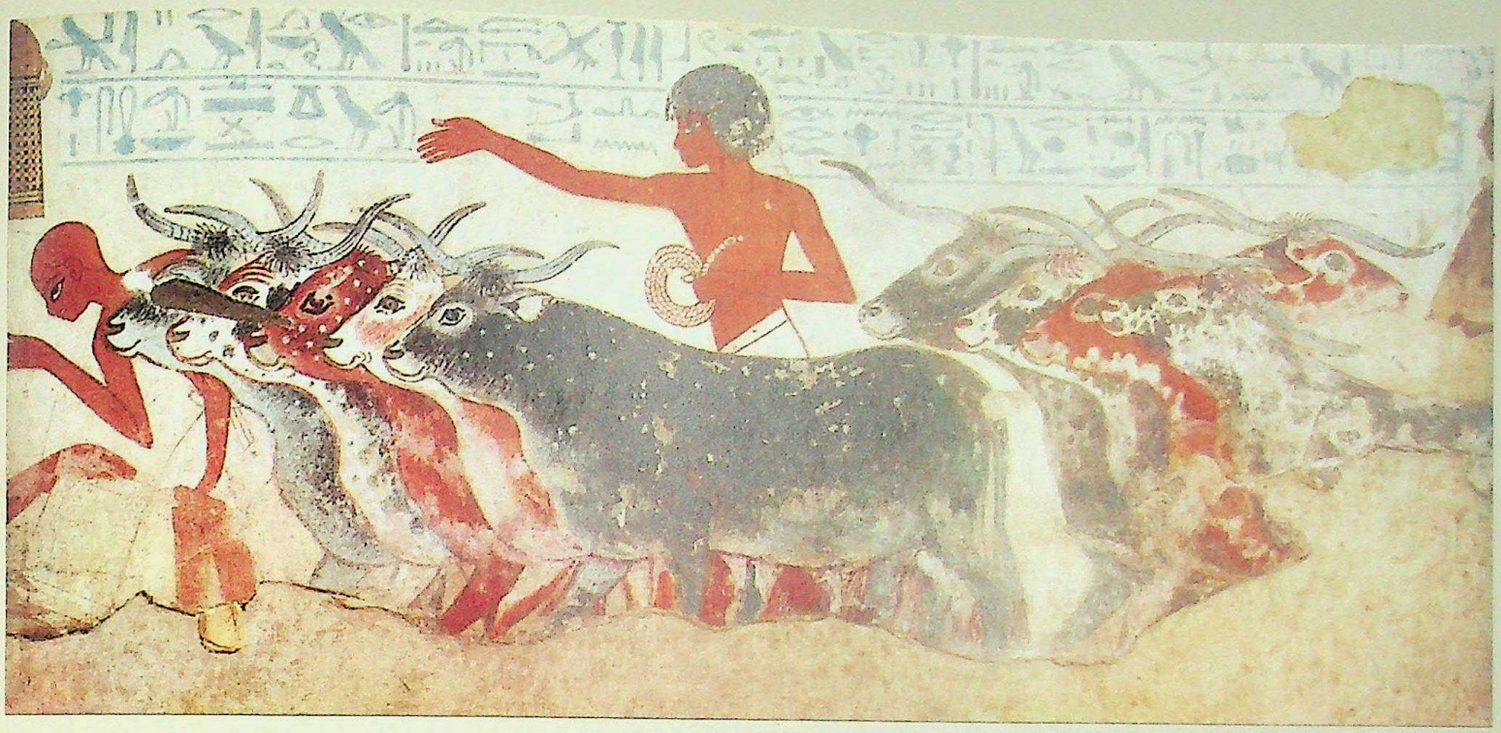

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Plate 10

A PEASANT HOLDING TWO HARES

Original in the British Museum (No. 37980).

Dimensions 13 in. × 9 in.

Described, but not illustrated, in *Wall Decorations of Egyptian Tombs*, p. 13.

The scene obviously dates from the Eighteenth dynasty. It is probably from Thebes but its provenance is unknown. The facial type is that of Tuthmosis IV (1420–1411 B.C.).

The man on the right carries a sheaf of corn which points to a harvest scene rather than the produce of the chase, where however, similar pictures of hares are not uncommon.[1]

The limpness of the animals is well indicated and the treatment of the fur has a realistic as well as a decorative appearance. The drawing of the ears, one showing the pink of the inside and the other the furry exterior, is a witness to the accuracy of observation so characteristic of the portrayal of animal forms.

Hares are commonly seen in the Nile Valley today and in nature there is a close resemblance to our example.

The man on the left bears what looks like a young gazelle in his arms.

[1] Cf. Davies, *Five Theban Tombs*, (E.E.S.), Pl. XXIII.

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Continued from page 5]

Birds, amongst which are heron, duck, ibis, spoonbill, kingfishers, plovers, and hoopoes, to list only a few, are delicately and faithfully rendered. In the British Museum a beautiful fowling scene with many of these birds can be seen and below them fish and lotus flowers are painted with an equally high standard of line and colour.

In conclusion it may be said that there is no other ancient art which provides us with such a vast quantity of paintings extending over so long a period. A large amount is still preserved on the monuments although the last hundred years have unfortunately seen much destruction as witnessed by previous records made by early nineteenth century copyists such as Hay, Wilkinson and others, of mural paintings which no longer exist. In recent years too, a great deal has been destroyed through ignorance and negligence.

The precious fragments of Minoan frescoes compared with the extant paintings of Egypt amount to a very small number when the restorations are omitted, and the paintings of Assyria still less. The modern spectator confronted by the immense labour expended on such a tomb-chapel as that of Rekh-mi-re (No. 100)[1] or the vast tomb of King Sethos I in the Valley of the Kings, may well marvel at what has come down to us.

[1] Davies, *Tomb of the Vizier Rekh-mi-re*, (M.M.A.), 2 vols.

Note on Plate 1

FRAGMENT OF A MARSH SCENE

Original in the British Museum, No. 1518.
Dimensions of original 24 in. × 14 in.
Provenance unknown but perhaps from an Old Kingdom (2778–2423 B.C.) tomb at Saqqara.

It has been suggested (W. S. Smith, Boston Bulletin, Vol. XLVII, p. 25, June 1949), that the fragment may be one of several from the Saite tomb of Mentuemhat (No. 34) at Thebes which belongs to the period 663–525 B.C. A close comparison however of the style of our illustration with its delicate low relief and the treatment of the birds, makes the association with the pieces of the marsh scene from Mentuemhat doubtful and its derivation from the Old Kingdom fairly probable.

The composition is not uncommon in the Old Kingdom and the very low relief on limestone is characteristic of this earlier date.[1] It is as usual, covered with paint which, when freshly applied, detracted from the modelled effect which is now visible on the birds. This plate differs from the rest in that it is not painted on a plaster surface but on sculptured limestone.

The bending papyrus heads and buds spring from red spathes at the edge of the water. A diversity of birds fly about or perch on the reeds. Several ducks are to be seen on the left. On a stem above is a hoopoe—a bird not usually associated with marsh-lands. An ichneumon rat climbs a stem in search of eggs or nestlings. To the right is a small bird of indefinite species, and below, standing amongst the red spathes at the base of the reeds, is a cormorant.

These marsh-lands were common in the north in the Nile delta. At the present day there are no marshes further south until the reaches of the Blue and White Nile but in ancient times papyrus thickets were doubtless a feature of the river banks to a greater extent if we credit the many scenes of fishing and fowling in the Theban tombs.

[1] Davies, *Ptahhetep*, part II, (E.E.S.) Pl. XIII, and also W. S. Smith, *A History of Egyptian Sculpture and Painting in the Old Kingdom*, Boston, Pl. 60.

ABBREVIATIONS

An. Eg. Paintings . . . Nina M. Davies and Alan H. Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Paintings*, 3 vols., Oriental Institute of Chicago, 1936.
E.E.S. . . . Egypt Exploration Society.
M.M.A. . . . Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

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